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**Critical Models** *Interventions and Catchwords*

Theodor W. Adorno

*Translated and with a Preface by Henry W. Pickford*

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Thus a catchword that unintentionally recurs in many of the articles suggests itself: reified consciousness, into which the essays seek to intervene, whether it be in the work of the human sciences or in the attitude of teachers toward philosophy, in the cliché of the twenties or the evil survival of sexual taboos, in the prefabricated world of television or in unfettered opinion. This unity at the same time prescribes the limit: consciousness is criticized where it is merely the reflection of the reality that sustains it.

The practical prospects therefore are limited. Whoever puts forward proposals easily makes himself into an accomplice. Talk of a "we" one identifies with already implies complicity with what is wrong and the illusion that goodwill and a readiness to engage in communal action can achieve something where every will is powerless and where the identification with *hommes de bonne volonté* is a disguised form of evil. A purist attitude, however, that refrains from intervening likewise reinforces that from which it timorously recoils. Such a contradiction cannot be settled by reflection; it is the constitution of reality that dictates the contradiction. At a historical moment, however, where a praxis that would refer to the totality appears to be blocked everywhere, even paltry reforms may presume more right than they in fact are due.

December 1962

## Why Still Philosophy

To a question such as "why still philosophy?"—for the formulation of which I myself am responsible, although its dilettantish tone does not escape me—most people will already guess the answer. They will expect a train of thought that accumulates all kinds of difficulties and reservations in order to lead ultimately, more or less cautiously, to a "nevertheless" and the affirmation of what at first had been rhetorically cast into doubt. This all too familiar circuit corresponds to a conformist and apologetic attitude that characterizes itself as positive and reckons in advance on consent. And indeed perhaps nothing better can be expected from someone whose job it is to teach philosophy, whose bourgeois existence depends on its continued survival, and who undermines his own immediate interests as soon as he contests it. All that notwithstanding, I have some right to raise the question for the simple reason that I am not at all sure of the answer.

Anyone who defends a cause deemed obsolete and superfluous by the spirit of the age places himself in the most disadvantageous position. His arguments sound halfhearted. "Yes but . . .," "Consider, however . . .," he says, as though trying to talk his audience into something they don't want. Anyone who doesn't want to be dissuaded from philosophy must take this misfortune into account. He must know that philosophy is no longer applicable to the techniques for mastering one's life—techniques in both the literal and figurative senses—with which philosophy was

once so closely entwined. And philosophy no longer offers a medium of self-cultivation beyond these techniques, as was the case during the era of Hegel, when for a few short decades the very small class of German intellectuals communicated in their collective philosophical language. Roughly since the death of Kant philosophy has made itself suspect because of its disparity with the positive sciences, especially the natural sciences, and it was the first discipline in public awareness to succumb to the crisis of the humanistic concept of culture, about which I need not say a great deal. The Kantian and Hegelian revivals, whose titles alone already reveal the feebleness of their programs, have not changed the situation much. Finally, in the general tendency toward specialization, philosophy too has established itself as a specialized discipline, one purified of all specific content. In so doing, philosophy has denied its own constitutive concept: the intellectual freedom that does not obey the dictates of specialized knowledge. At the same time, by abstaining from all definite content, whether as a formal logic and theory of science or as the legend of Being beyond all beings, philosophy declared its bankruptcy regarding concrete societal goals. To be sure philosophy thereby merely ratified a process that is largely tantamount to its own history. More and more fields were snatched away from it and transformed into science; it scarcely had any other choice but to become either a science itself or a minuscule, tolerated enclave,<sup>1</sup> which as such already conflicts with what it wants to be: a non-particularized pursuit. Newtonian physics was still called philosophy. Modern scientific consciousness would see in this an archaic relic, a vestige of that earlier epoch of Greek speculation when sound explanation of nature and sublime metaphysics were still inseparably interwoven in the name of the essence of things. This is why some resolute beings have proclaimed that such archaic themes constitute the only philosophy and have tried to restore them. But the consciousness suffering from the fissured state of the world and conjuring up a past unity out of its own deprivation contradicts the very contents it aspires to win for itself. Therefore it must autocratically promote its own primordial language.<sup>2</sup> Restoration is as futile in philosophy as it is anywhere else. Philosophy has to protect itself from the chatter of culture and the abracadabra of worldviews. It also should not imagine that specialized work in epistemological theory, or whatever else prides itself on being research, is actually philosophy. Yet a philosophy forswearing all of that must in the end be irreconcilably at odds with the dominant consciousness. Nothing else raises it above the suspicion of apologetics. Philosophy that satisfies its own intention, and does not childishly skip behind its own history and the real one, has its lifeblood in the resistance against the common practices of today and what they serve, against the justification of what happens to be the case.

Even the greatest achievement of philosophical speculation to date, that of Hegel, is no longer binding. Anyone whom public opinion has once categorized as a dialectician—and no one who in any way has a public life can escape being classified—must indicate how he distinguishes himself from Hegel. It is not at all a difference of individual conviction. Rather, the difference is demanded by the movement of the subject matter itself, and it was no one less than Hegel himself who demanded that thought abandon itself to the subject matter without reservation. Traditional philosophy's claim to totality, culminating in the thesis that the real is rational, is indistinguishable from apologetics.<sup>3</sup> But this thesis has become absurd. A philosophy that would still set itself up as total, as a system, would become a delusional system. Yet if philosophy renounces the claim to totality and no longer claims to develop out of itself the whole that should be the truth, then it comes into conflict with its entire tradition. This is the price it must pay for the fact that, once cured of its own delusional system, it denounces the delusional system of reality. No longer is it then a self-sufficient, stringent network of argumentative justification. The state of philosophy in society, which philosophy itself should scrutinize rather than deny, corresponds to its own desperate state: the necessity of formulating what nowadays under the title of 'the absurd' is already being recuperated by the machinery. After everything,<sup>4</sup> the only responsible philosophy is one that no longer imagines it had the Absolute at its command; indeed philosophy must forbid the thought of it in order not to betray that thought, and at the same time it must not bargain away anything of the emphatic concept of truth. This contradiction is philosophy's element. It defines philosophy as negative. Kant's famous dictum that the critical path is the only one still open to us belongs to those propositions constituting a philosophy that proves itself because the propositions, as fragments, survive beyond the system that conceived them. Admittedly, the idea of critique itself hearkens back to the philosophical tradition that today lies in ruins. While in the meantime the domain of every kind of knowledge has been confiscated by the specialized disciplines to such a degree that philosophical thought feels terrorized and fears being refuted as dilettantism whenever it takes on specific content, in reaction to this the concept of primordially attained an honorable status it does not merit. The more reified the world becomes, the thicker the veil cast upon nature, the more the thinking weaving that veil in its turn claims ideologically to be nature, primordial experience. On the other hand, ever since the celebrated pre-Socratics, traditional philosophers have practiced critique. Xenophanes, whose school the current anti-conceptual concept of Being dates back to, strove to demythologize the forces of nature. And Aristotle in turn saw through the Platonic hypostatization of the concept of Being into an idea. In

modernity, Descartes convicted the scholastic philosophy of turning mere opinion into dogma. Leibniz criticized empiricism, and Kant criticized the philosophies of both Leibniz and Hume at once; Hegel criticized Kant's philosophy, and Marx in turn criticized Hegel's. For all of these thinkers, critique was not a mere adornment accompanying what the jargon of ontology thirty years ago would have called their 'project.' It did not document a point of view that could be adopted according to personal taste. Rather its very existence lay in cogent argumentation. Each of those thinkers found his own truth in critique. Critique alone, as the unity of the problem and its arguments, not the adoption of received theses, has laid the foundation for what may be considered the productive unity of the history of philosophy. In the progressive continuity of such critique even those philosophers whose doctrines insist on the eternal and the timeless acquired their temporal nucleus, their historical status.

Contemporary philosophical critique is confronted with two schools of thought that, by constituting the spirit of the age, *volens volens* exert an influence beyond the walls of the academic preserve. They diverge and nonetheless complement each other. Especially in the Anglo-Saxon countries logical positivism, originally inaugurated by the Vienna Circle, has gained ground to the point of becoming a virtual monopoly. Many consider it modern in the sense of being the most rigorous faculty of enlightenment, adequate to the so-called technical-scientific age. Whatever does not conform to it is relegated to the status of residual metaphysics, its own unrecognized mythology or, in the terminology of those who know nothing of art, art. Opposed to this movement are the ontological approaches, active above all in the German-speaking countries. The school of Heidegger, who, incidentally, since his publications following the so-called turn has become rather averse to the word "ontology,"<sup>5</sup> pursues the archaic theme farthest, whereas the French version, existentialism, modified the ontological approach with enlightenment motives and political engagement. Positivism and ontology are anathema to one another; Rudolf Carnap, one of positivism's foremost representatives, has attacked Heidegger's theory, indeed quite wrongly, for being meaningless.<sup>6</sup> Conversely, for the ontologists of Heideggerian provenance positivist thinking is forgetful of Being, a profanation of the authentic question. The ontologists are afraid of getting their hands dirty with the merely factually existent, which lies in the positivists' hands alone. Thus it is all the more surprising that the two directions coincide in an essential point. Both have chosen metaphysics as their common enemy. In positivism this goes without saying: because metaphysics essentially transcends that which is the case,<sup>7</sup> it is not tolerated by positivism, whose very name indicates its adherence to the positive, the existent, the given.

But Heidegger as well, schooled as he is in the metaphysical tradition, has tried emphatically to disassociate himself from it. With the name of metaphysics he baptizes the thinking that, at least since Aristotle, if not already in Plato, separates Being [*Sein*] and being [*Seiendes*], the concept and what is conceptualized; one could, in a language Heidegger rejected, say: subject and object. According to Heidegger, a thinking that analyzes and differentiates, destroys through reflection what the words themselves say; in short, everything Hegel called "the labor and the exertion of the concept" and equated with philosophy<sup>8</sup> is for Heidegger already the apostasy from philosophy and beyond repair because prefigured in the nature of Being itself, "through the historicity of Being." In both positivism and Heidegger—at least in his later work—speculation is the target of attack. In both cases the thought that autonomously raises itself above the facts through interpreting them and that cannot be reclaimed by them without leaving a surplus is condemned for being empty and vain concept-mongering; according to Heidegger, however, thinking, in the sense it has received in occidental history, profoundly misses the truth. For him that truth is an appearing in itself, a self-disclosing; legitimate thinking is nothing other than the ability to perceive this. Cryptically, philology becomes a philosophical authority. This common aversion against metaphysics lessens the immediate sense of paradox when one of Heidegger's students working in Kiel, Walter Bröcker, recently attempted to combine positivism and the philosophy of Being by granting positivism the entire realm of existence and superimposing over it, as on a higher plane, the doctrine of Being, expressly identified as mythology.<sup>9</sup> Being, in whose name Heidegger's philosophy increasingly concentrates itself, is for him—as a pure self-presentation to passive consciousness—just as immediate, just as independent of the mediations of the subject as the facts and the sensory data are for the positivists. In both philosophical movements thinking becomes a necessary evil and is broadly discredited. Thinking loses its element of independence. The autonomy of reason vanishes: the part of reason that exceeds the subordinate reflection upon and adjustment to pre-given data. With it, however, goes the conception of freedom and, potentially, the self-determination of human society. If their humane compunctions did not keep most of the positivists from going so far, they would have to demand that praxis adapt itself to the facts, before which thinking is for them powerless, simply an anticipation or classification, invalid in the face of the only thing that counts: that which simply is the case. For Heidegger, however, thinking would be the reverentially conceptless, passive hearkening to a Being that always only speaks Being, without any right to critique and constrained to capitulate equally before everything that can appeal to the

shimmering mightiness of Being. Heidegger's falling in with the *Führerstaat*, Hitler's leader state, was no act of opportunism but rather a consequence of a philosophy that equated Being and *Führer*.

If philosophy is still necessary, it is so only in the way it has been from time immemorial: as critique, as resistance to the expanding heteronomy, even if only as thought's powerless attempt to remain its own master and to convict of untruth, by their own criteria, both a fabricated mythology and a conniving, resigned acquiescence on the other of untruth. It is incumbent upon philosophy, as long as it is not prohibited as it was in the christianized Athens of late antiquity, to provide a refuge for freedom. Not that there is any hope that it could break the political tendencies that are throttling freedom throughout the world both from within and without and whose violence permeates the very fabric of philosophical argumentation. Whatever takes place within the interior of the concept always reflects something of the movement of reality. But if the two heteronomies are the untruth and if this can be convincingly demonstrated, then this not only adds a new link to the dreary chain of philosophical movements but also registers a trace of the hope that unfreedom and oppression—the evil whose malevolence requires as little philosophical proof as does its existence—nonetheless may not have the last word. Such a critique would need to define the two prevailing philosophies as isolated aspects of a truth that historically was forced to diverge. As little as these two aspects can be glued together into a so-called synthesis, nonetheless they should be reflected upon individually. The error in positivism is that it takes as its standard of truth the contingently given division of labor, that between the sciences and social praxis as well as that within science itself, and allows no theory that could reveal the division of labor to be itself derivative and mediated and thus strip it of its false authority. If in the age of emancipation philosophy wanted to provide a foundation for science, and if Fichte and Hegel interpreted philosophy as the one and only science, then the most general structure derived from the sciences, its ingrained and societally rigidified procedure, would constitute the philosophy of positivism, the mechanism for its own self-legitimation, a circle that, surprisingly, seems hardly to disturb the fanatics of logical tidiness. Philosophy resigns by equating itself with what should in fact first be illuminated by philosophy. The existence of science *telle quelle*, just as it occurs within and amid all the insufficiencies and irrationalities of the societal fabric, becomes the criterion of its own truth. With such a reverence for reified reality, positivism is reified consciousness. Despite all its hostility toward mythology it forsakes the anti-mythological impulse of philosophy to smash through human-made constructions and return them to their human measure.

Fundamental ontology, however, blinds itself to the mediation not of the factual but of the concept. It suppresses the knowledge that those essences—or whatever it calls the results of progressive sublimation it opposes to the 'facts' of positivism—are always also results of thinking, subject, spirit. Precisely the existence of the subject and its conditionedness indicate a being that has not sprung whole out of Being: societalized individuals. In the hutted sanctuary<sup>10</sup> in which the philosophy of repristination entrenches itself against the profanity of mere fact as well as against concepts—which are related to each other in that facts are separate from and subsumed under conceptual unities—one encounters again the schism the harbingers of the indivisible think themselves immune to. Their words are inevitably concepts, to the extent that they can be thought at all; but the doctrine of Being would like to be a thinking still within the ambit of resolute archaism. However, just as concepts by their very meaning require a content that fulfills them, and just as, in Hegel's unparalleled insight, the mere thought of identity requires non-identity from which alone identity can be asserted, so too even the purest concepts depend on their Other immanently, and not merely from a polar duality. Thinking itself, of which all concepts are a function, cannot be imagined without the activity of someone thinking implied in the word "thinking." This reverse relation already contains the element that, according to the idealist tradition, must first be constituted by the concept and that, according to the mythology of Being, is together with the concept an epiphenomenon of a third element. Without the determination by those two elements this third thing would be wholly indeterminate; just to be able to indicate it at all amounts to defining it by means of the same elements that are being so assiduously denied. Even the Kantian transcendental subject, whose legacy transcendental-subjectless Being would like to inherit, as a unity requires the manifold as much as, inversely, the manifold requires the unity of reason.<sup>11</sup> Independent of the contents that constitute a unity, the concept of unity itself remains unintelligible, and it is just as impossible to conjure away the trace of the factual from those contents as it is to remove the difference between the concept and the contents it requires. No unity, no matter how formal, even if it be pure logical unity, can be conceived even as a possibility without that toward which it gestures; even the formal-logical Something is the remnant of the material that pure logic was so proud of having separated out.<sup>12</sup> However, the reason for what Günther Anders called the 'pseudo-concretion' in the thinking of Being, and consequently for all the fraud it propagates, is that it claims to be inviolably pure of what it ultimately is and from whose concreteness it likewise profits.<sup>13</sup> It celebrates its triumph in a strategic retreat. Its mythical ambiguity merely



camouflages the specific imbrication of the constitutive elements of thought from which it can no more easily free itself than conditioned consciousness ever could. Because being and concept remain artfully undifferentiated in the mythology of Being, this ambiguity presents Being as though it were beyond being as well as concept and, as Kant would say, obtains its absolute character surreptitiously.<sup>14</sup> Even the mythology of Being, by suppressing the human participation in the highest concepts and idolizing them, is reified consciousness. But dialectic means nothing other than insisting on the mediation of what appears to be immediate and on the reciprocity of immediacy and mediation as it unfolds at all levels. Dialectic is not a third standpoint but rather the attempt, by means of an immanent critique, to develop philosophical standpoints beyond themselves and beyond the despotism of a thinking based on standpoints. In the face of the naiveté of an autocratic consciousness that considers its own limitation—namely what is 'given' to it—to be unlimited, philosophy should be the binding commitment to non-naiveté. In a world that has been thoroughly permeated by the structures of the social order, a world that so overpowers every individual that scarcely any option remains but to accept it on its own terms, such naiveté reproduces itself incessantly and disastrously. What people have forced upon them by a boundless apparatus, which they themselves constitute and which they are locked into, virtually eliminates all natural elements and becomes 'nature' to them. Reified consciousness is perfectly naive and, as reification, also perfectly unnaive. Philosophy must dissolve the semblance of the obvious as well as the semblance of the obscure.

The integration of philosophy and science, already inscribed *in nuce* in the earliest documents of Western metaphysics, strove to protect thought from dogmatic tutelage, which thought resembles by its autocratic nature and which is the negation of all freedom. But freedom was the goal of the postulate of the direct "involvement" of vital, active mind in all acts of cognition, the indefeasible norm of self-evidence ever since Spinoza.<sup>15</sup> It was, in the realm of mere logic, the anticipatory image of an actual state in which human beings would finally be free, rid of every kind of blind authority. This has reversed itself. The invocation of science, of its ground rules, of the exclusive validity of the methods that science has now completely become, now constitutes a surveillance authority punishing free, uncoddled, undisciplined thought and tolerating nothing of mental activity other than what has been methodologically sanctioned. Science and scholarship, the medium of autonomy, has degenerated into an instrument of heteronomy.<sup>16</sup> The original *raison d'être* is removed, consigned to the contingency of defamed *aperçus*, isolated, and

in fact degraded into prattle about worldviews. The philosophical critique of scientivism, which conclusively refutes such a system of thought, is therefore not what its well-meaning adversaries accuse it of being but rather the destruction of what is already destructive. The critique of the current philosophies does not plead for the disappearance of philosophy nor for its replacement by separate disciplines such as social science. It intends both formally and materially to promote precisely that manner of intellectual freedom that has no place in the regnant philosophical movements. A thinking that approaches its objects openly, rigorously, and on the basis of progressive knowledge, is also free toward its objects in the sense that it refuses to have rules prescribed to it by organized knowledge. It turns the quintessence of the experience accumulated in it to the objects, rends the veil with which society conceals them, and perceives them anew. Were philosophy to beat back the fear caused by the tyranny of the prevailing philosophical movements—the ontological intimidation not to think anything that is not pure, and the scientistic intimidation not to think anything that is not "connected" to the corpus of findings recognized as scientifically valid—then it would be capable of recognizing what that fear prohibits, what an unmarred consciousness in fact would be intent upon. The "to the things themselves"<sup>17</sup> that philosophical phenomenology had dreamed of like a dreamer who dreams he's waking up<sup>18</sup> can only come true for a philosophy that stops hoping to acquire knowledge with the magical stroke of eidetic intuition,<sup>19</sup> and instead thinks through the subjective and objective mediations without, however, conforming to the latent primacy of organized method, which over and over again offers phenomenological movements only a series of fetishes, homemade concepts instead of their longed-for things. Had not all positivist locutions become deeply suspect, then one could imagine that only a consciousness both free and reflected in itself would be open to what traditional philosophy has obstructed by confusing itself with what it intends to interpret. Within traditional philosophy's exhaustion at the succession of its variations lies the potential for a philosophy that could break the magic spell.

Nonetheless it is completely uncertain whether philosophy, as a conceptual activity of the interpretive mind, is still the order of the day, whether it has fallen behind what it should conceptualize—the state of the world rushing toward catastrophe. It appears to be too late for contemplation. Whatever is manifestly absurd flies in the face of any idea of comprehending it. The abolition of philosophy was forecast more than a hundred years ago.<sup>20</sup> The fact that in the East *Diamat* is proclaimed to be Marxist philosophy, as though it were compatible with Marxist theory just like that, testifies to the inversion of Marxism into a static dogma

deadened to its own contents or, as they themselves say, into an 'ideology.'<sup>21</sup> Anyone who still philosophizes can do so only by denying the Marxist thesis that reflection has become obsolete. Marx believed that the possibility of changing the world from top to bottom was immediately present, here and now. But only stubbornness could still maintain this thesis as Marx formulated it. The proletariat to whom he appealed was not yet integrated into society: it was rapidly sinking into destitution, whereas on the other hand societal power did not yet command the means to assure overwhelming odds for itself in the event of any serious conflict. Philosophy, as at once both rigorous and free thought, now finds itself in an entirely different situation. Marx would have been the last person to tear thought free from the real movement of history. Hegel, who was aware of the transience of art and prophesied its end, had made its progress dependent upon the "consciousness of needs."<sup>22</sup> But what is right for art is just as right for philosophy, whose truth content converges with that of art, by virtue of the technical procedures of art diverging from those of philosophy. The undiminished persistence of suffering, fear, and menace necessitates that the thought that cannot be realized should not be discarded. After having missed its opportunity, philosophy must come to know, without any mitigation, why the world—which could be paradise here and now—can become hell itself tomorrow. Such knowledge would indeed truly be philosophy. It would be anachronistic to abolish it for the sake of a praxis that at this historical moment would inevitably eternalize precisely the present state of the world, the very critique of which is the concern of philosophy. Praxis, whose purpose is to produce a rational and politically mature humanity, remains under the spell of disaster unless it has a theory that can think the totality in its untruth. It goes without saying that this theory should not be a warmed-over idealism but rather must incorporate societal and political reality and its dynamic.

In the last forty or fifty years philosophy has been claiming, most of the time spuriously, to oppose idealism. What was genuine in this was the opposition to decorative platitudes; to the intellectual hubris that makes spirit into an absolute; to the glorification of this world, as though it already were freedom. The anthropocentrism inherent in all idealistic conceptions cannot be saved; one need only remember the changes in cosmology during the last one hundred and fifty years. Surely not the least of the tasks incumbent upon philosophy is to help spirit<sup>23</sup> appropriate the experiences of the natural sciences without recourse to amateurish analogies and syntheses. An unproductive gulf exists between the natural sciences and the so-called realm of spirit; so great a gulf that at times the spirit's engagement with itself and the social world appears to

be a gratuitous conceit. Something would already be achieved if philosophy at least sought to bring people's consciousness of themselves to the same state of knowledge that they have of nature, instead of them living like cavemen in thrall to their own knowledge of a cosmos in which the hardly sapient species *homo* makes a helpless go of it. In the face of this task and the undiminished insight into society's laws of motion, philosophy could hardly presume to affirm that it posits out of itself something like a positive meaning. To this extent it makes common cause with positivism, even more with modern art, before whose phenomena most of what passes today for philosophical thinking fails for lack of any relationship to them. But philosophy's turn against idealism, which has been proclaimed ad nauseam, did not intend militant enlightenment but resignation. Thought has been intimidated and no longer dares raise itself, not even in fundamental ontology's devotional submissiveness to Being. In its opposition to such resignation, there is a moment of truth in idealism. The realization of materialism would mean today the end of materialism, of the blind and degrading dependence of human beings upon material conditions. Spirit is no more the absolute than it is entirely reducible to a concrete entity. It will come to know what it is only when it stops invalidating itself. The force of such resistance is the sole criterion for philosophy today.<sup>24</sup> It is as irreconcilable with reified consciousness as Platonic enthusiasm once was. Only the excess of this consciousness beyond the factual makes it possible to call the universally conditioned by its rightful name. Philosophy desires peace with that Other, being, that the affirmative philosophies degrade by praising it and adapting themselves to it. For those philosophies everything becomes functional; even the conformity to what exists is for them a pretext for subjugating it intellectually. But what exists does not want to be deformed. Anything that has a function is already spellbound within the functional world. Only a thinking that has no mental sanctuary, no illusion of an inner realm, and that acknowledges its lack of function and power can perhaps catch a glimpse of an order of the possible and the nonexistent, where human beings and things each would be in their rightful place. Because philosophy is good for nothing, it is not yet obsolete; philosophy should not even invoke this point, lest it blindly repeat its wrong: self-justification by self-positing.<sup>25</sup>

This wrong was passed down from the idea of *philosophia perennis*—that philosophy is the vested bearer of eternal truth. This idea is exploded by Hegel's astounding proposition that philosophy is its own time comprehended in thought. The requirement seemed so self-evident to him that he did not hesitate to introduce it as a definition.<sup>26</sup> He was the first to gain insight into the temporal nucleus of truth. This was connected for him with the confidence that every significant philosophy, by expressing



its own stage of consciousness as a necessary aspect of the totality, at the same time also expressed the totality. The fact that this confidence together with the philosophy of identity met with disappointment lessens not only the pathos of subsequent philosophies but also their standing. What for Hegel was self-evident cannot possibly be claimed by the regnant philosophies today. No longer are they their own time comprehended in thought. Ontology even makes a virtue out of its provincialism.<sup>27</sup> The faithful counterpoint to this attitude is the helpless conceptual poverty of the positivists. They've tailored the rules of the game so that the reified consciousness of uninspired *bright boys*\* can consider itself to be the cutting edge of the spirit of the age. However, they are merely its symptom, and they disguise their deficiencies as the incorruptible virtue of those who will not have the wool pulled over their eyes. At most both movements belong to the spirit of the age as one of regression, and Nietzsche's backworldsmen once again have literally become backwoodsmen.<sup>28</sup> Against them philosophy must prove itself the most advanced consciousness—permeated with the potential of what could be different—but also a match for the power of regression, which it can transcend only after having incorporated and comprehended it. When today's philosophical archaism evades this requirement, which it surely perceives, by offering ancient truth as an alibi, and abuses progress, which it merely prevents by pretending to have already overcome it, then these are all just so many excuses. No dialectic of progress suffices to legitimate an intellectual condition that believes itself safe and sound only because its corner has not yet been infiltrated by the deployment of objectivity, with which even that spiritual condition itself is intertwined and which ensures that all appeals to what is safe and sound immediately reinforce the calamity.<sup>29</sup> The self-righteous profundity that treats the progressive consciousness *en canaille* is flat. Reflections extending beyond the magical incantations of the ontologists as well as beyond the *vérités de faits* of the positivists are not trendy stupidities, as the ideology of the yellowed lampoons would have it,<sup>30</sup> rather they are motivated by those very facts of the matter that ontologists as well as positivists pretend are the only things worthy of regard. As long as philosophy retains the faintest trace of the title of a book published by an old Kantian more than thirty years ago, *From the Philosophy Corner*, it will remain nothing more than the fun its detractors make of it.<sup>31</sup> Not by avuncular advice will it transcend the academic industry. All wisdom has degenerated into wizened prudence.<sup>32</sup> There is also no avail to philosophy in the behavior of that teacher who in the prefascist era felt prompted to set his age aright and inspected Marlene Dietrich's Blauer Engel so as to see firsthand how bad things really were.<sup>33</sup> Flights of this sort into concrete

experience convict philosophy of being the refuse of precisely the history with whose agent philosophy mistakenly confuses itself out of a sense of nostalgia for its erstwhile cultural role. Not to resemble any of this in any way at all would not be the worst criterion for philosophy nowadays. Philosophy should not with foolish arrogance set about collecting information and then take a position; rather it must unrestrictedly, without recourse to some mental refuge, experience: it must do exactly what is avoided by those who refuse to forsake the maxim that every philosophy must finally produce something positive. Rimbaud's "*il faut être absolument moderne*" is neither an aesthetic program nor a program for aesthetes: it is a categorical imperative of philosophy. Whatever wants nothing to do with the trajectory of history belongs all the more truly to it. History promises no salvation and offers the possibility of hope only to the concept whose movement follows history's path to the very extreme.